

## Chapter 07. Saṃkrāntivāda

According to the Samayabhedoparacana-cakra, Saṃkrāntivāda was founded by Uttara, “at the beginning of the 4th century” after Buddha’s parinirvāṇa. If we consider Asoka’s ascendance to the throne to be 116 years after the Buddha, then this school was founded around the 1st century C.E.

- Saṃkrāntivāda < Saṃkrānti + vāda < sam + kram (說轉部)
- = ‘Crossing/going over’, transmigration

The Saṃkrāntivāda-s doctrine was rather obscure. According to this school, there is a set of non-changing skandha-s that crosses over from one existence to the next.

This is a new theory. The doctrine was not accepted by other schools as there is no skandhas that can crossover. In Sarvāstivāda, the skandhas are momentary. In the Vedic religion – theory of Atman or “self” was rejected by Buddhists so they try to work out some idea similar to “Atman” but not the same.

The five skandha-s (aggregate) constitute the totality of phenomenal existence:

1. rūpa (matter),
2. vedanā (sensation/feeling),
3. saṃjñā (ideation),
4. saṃskāra (conditionings),
5. Vijñāna (consciousness).

The analysis in terms of the five skandha-s is often employed in the sūtra-s to explain the Buddhist doctrine of no-Self (nairātmya). This fundamental Buddhist doctrine continues to be the central concern of Abhidharma, and accordingly, the five-skandha scheme continues to be an important Abhidharmika taxonomy. Skandha is explained as ‘heap’: Each of these five forms a heap of its own category which may be past, present or future. The import of this taxonomy is the emphasis that phenomena are all dependently arisen, without any ontological status; they are all reducible to these five skandha-s which alone are the ultimate reals forming the basis of our conceptual superimposition.

The saṃskāra - skandha includes the conjoined (saṃprayukta) dharma-s, that is, caitta-s, as well as the disjoined (viprayukta) dharma-s. The rūpa skandha includes a peculiar matter called avijñapti and special types of subtle matter such as those of the sensory faculties called ‘clear matter’ (rūpa -prasāda) and that of a being in the intermediate existence (antarābhava).

In the Abhidharma conception, all dharma-s are saṃskāra-s - conditioning forces. These forces themselves are conditioned; hence the term is also synonymous with saṃskṛta. This is quite in keeping with the notion in early Buddhism which declares that “all saṃskāra -s are impermanent” (sarve saṃskārā anityā). However, in the five skandha scheme, the saṃskārā -skandha refers to all other dharma-s excluding the other four skandha-s. This taxonomy does not include the unconditioned dharma-s, as the latter, being beyond space and time, do not form such heaps.

In Xuan Zang's version of the Cakra, the Saṃkrāntivāda school is also given as Sautrāntika. But it seems to have nothing to do with all that we know as Sautrāntika in later time. According to the Sri Lankan tradition, it branched off from the Sarvāstivāda, and from it the Sautrāntika was derived. Some scholars consider it as the forerunner of the Sautrāntika. It may be seen as a compromise between the Sarvāstivāda and the Vātsīputrīya (Pudgala) so they inherited both their theories.

In Vasumitra's treatise, the Samayabhedoparacana-cakra, "they insisted on the theory of transference of the skandhas from one world to another." Another statement in Abhidharma Nyāyānusāra, "There are two kinds of Skandhas. One is a group of derived Skandhas and there is a group of one taste Skandhas." According to Vasumitra's Samayabhedoparacana-cakra, he identified Saṃkrāntivāda with Sautrāntika. In a way it may not be possible because Sautrāntika never taught this kind of doctrine of Pudgala. The Samayabhedoparacana-cakra enumerates the following four doctrines as characteristics of the Sautrāntika school. The skandhas transmigrate from one world to the other, hence the name Saṃkrāntivāda. There are mūlāntika skandhas and eka-rasa skandhas. An average person (pṛthagjana) also possess the potential of becoming a Buddha. There are paramātha pudgala.

There were pressing questions in the period of the Abhidharma schools as the Abhidharmika-s were searching for theories all the time.

The Buddha had taught that all conditioned things are impermanent and "non-self." At the same time he also talked about the facts of karma and samsara existence. During the Abhidharma periods, all conditioned dharmas are taught to be momentary. So there is a need to explain the continuity of karmic force, memory and samsanic existence. Example if there is no self, who transmigrate? Who goes round in samsara? Where is memory stored?

Different schools proposed different explanations in answer to these questions. And the Saṃkrāntivāda proposed a permanent one- one taste Skandhas (eka-rasa-skandhas). The one taste skandhas are interpreted as bīja of one taste, which continue to exist from time immemorial without changing their nature. Very little is known about these Sautrāntika doctrines or about the origin and significance of the theory of bīja. There are several texts which contain references to the bija theory but they do not make any mention to the eka-rasa skandhas.

The one-taste Skandhas is the fore runner of ālayavijñāna doctrine. The Buddhists were the first people in the world to develop a theory of the subconscious mind. This is because the Buddha's has taught that we are suffering because of our minds. In the first verse of the Dhamapada, it states that "Mind is the forerunner of all things". In the most developed form it is called ālayavijñāna. Before the ālayavijñāna doctrine (central doctrine of Yogācāra), there were several other Abhidharma schools with elements resembling the ālayavijñāna. These formulations derived primarily from the consideration of the preservation of karmic efficacy, Saṃsāric transmigration, memory and meditational experiences, as among proofs for the existence of the ālayavijñāna.

They include:

1. the 'Existence-factor Consciousness' (bhāvana-vijñāna) of the Theravāda
2. the 'Root-consciousness' (mūla- vijñāna) of the Mahāsāṅghika
3. the 'Skandhas Co-terminous with Saṃsāra' (Asaṃsārika-skandha) of the
4. the 'One-taste Skandha' (ekarasa-skandha) of the Saṃkrāntivāda contributed to the ālayavijñāna theory.

These doctrines are synonyms of ālayavijñāna. It has been there but called by different names and the forerunner to ālayavijñāna.

Eka rasa skandhas (samaya bhedo paracha cakra)

There is root end skandhas and one taste skandhas.

The Noble Dharma exists also at the stage of the ordinary worldling. It is held that there is a Pudgala in the absolute sense (parama arthas). Other views held by the school are mostly the same as those in the Sarvāstivāda. This is what we have about the doctrine. They became a distinctive school because of this doctrine.

One taste skandhas and memory from Abhidharma Mahāvibhāṣa Śāstra

Some assert that there are two types of skandha-s

- 1) Root end skandha-s
- 2) Activity skandha-s

The former skandha-s is one that is the agent of transmigration. They are permanent; the latter skandha-s is something that arises from it and are impermanent. They further assert thus: Although the root and activity skandha-s are distinct, they nevertheless as a unity constitute a sentient being. In this way, what has been done previously can be remembered; for what have been done by the activity-skandha-s are remembered by the root-skandha-s. The Saṃkrāntivāda developed this idea and explain with textual basis to convince after going through the Abhidharma.

Similarity to pudgalavāda. The Vātsīputrīya proposes the concept of a pudgala, that is real and ultimate individual who exists over and above the skandha-s. the pudgalavāda is formulated to explain the process of saṃsāra and the agent of karma in response to the dharma theory. We can see that the fundamental skandha-s of the Saṃkrāntivāda that transmigrate from one existence to the next a very similar idea to the Vātsīputrīya pudgala going round in saṃsāra.

Sarvāstivāda inspiration: svabhāva (self nature) and kāritra (activity)

The Saṃkrāntivāda are Sarvāstivādins who says that every dharma has a svabhāva and kāritra. This theory seems to be derived from the Sarvāstivāda doctrines of a dharma's intrinsic nature which is always existent and its activity which is momentary.

This discussion, though intended to be an explanation of memory, is in fact in a broader sense one explaining the mechanism of how previous experiences are retained. It is definitely a very early attempt at understanding the working of the subconscious. Kuei Ji in fact takes the One-taste Skandha-s to be a subtle consciousness (細意識). This theory seems to be one derived from the Sarvāstivāda doctrine of a dharma's intrinsic nature which is always existent and its activity which is momentary. The only thing is that for the Sarvāstivāda, the intrinsic nature can only be said to be 'existent throughout time' (恆有), but not 'permanent' (常); only the unconditioned dharma-s are permanent. The 'Pudgala in the absolute sense' is clearly the root-skandha-s, which being permanent, is able to transmigrate from life to life. Given this doctrine of a permanent Pudgala, the question of the agent of saṃsāric transmigration, karma and memory are then answered.

Yin Shun takes this to be the forerunner of the Sautrāntika Seed theory. Together, the two types of skandha-s parallel the two aspects of seeds and their manifestation: The latent One-taste Skandha-s generate the phenomenal skandha-s.

Compared to the Sarvāstivāda: svabhāva and kāritra

"Although a dharma as an entity abides, when specific conditions obtain or by virtue of the Nature of things (dharmatā, 法爾力), the dharma entity changes [its mode of existence] distinctively and its function arises not having been and ceases after arising (本無今有, 有已還無). The dharma as an entity remains just as before, constantly abiding in its intrinsic characteristic. Thus, while a conditioned dharma constantly abides in its intrinsic characteristic, its specific capacity arises and ceases.

Sarvāstivāda : Only a conventional pudgala is said to transmigrate. But for the Sarvāstivāda, the individual dharma-s, each constantly abiding in its intrinsic characteristic, can be called dharma-Atman (法我), but not pudgala-Atman. The kāritra that arises from the dharma-entity too, being each different and momentary, cannot be established as pudgala. We can only conceptually designate a pudgala on the serial continuity of the unified skandha-s that give rise to their activities, and speak of a sentient being going from one existence to the next. The Cakra explains this position:

"It is only on the basis of the present appropriated serial continuity that a sentient being is conceptually designated. The [Sarvāstivāda school] asserts that all conditionings are momentary; there is definitely not any dharma that can transmigrate from the previous to the subsequent life. There is only the conventional pudgala that is said to transmigrate." We can say the person goes in saṃsāra but only in the conventional sense.

The Unconditioned and phenomena

The doctrine that "the Noble Dharma exists also at the stage of the ordinary worldling" possibly refers to the fact the True Pudgala exists in all beings. The root-skandha-s that continue unchanged from moment to moment would imply that they

are unconditioned. They would therefore not only be permanent, but absolutely pure that is, 'Noble Dharma-s'.

This doctrine seems to be linked to the proposition in Abhidharma Mahāvibhāṣa Śāstra:

“They are some who assert: the past and future [dharma-s] are not truly existent entities; the present, though existent, are unconditioned.”

If this is indeed a Saṃkrāntivāda's proposition, then this school clearly belongs to the present-only-exist (that is, Vibhajyavāda) lineage, since. For Sarvāsativāda, the pure (anāsrava) dharma-s are still in the future. It would also imply a theory that the whole phenomenal existence arises from moment to moment from the Unconditioned which is absolutely pure. The one-taste skandha, together with doctrines of the True Pudgala and the Noble Dharma, could even be compared in some sense to the tathāgata-garbha (如來藏) theory of the Yogācāra.

The pudgala in the Six-six Treatise of Saṃkrāntivāda

A Six-six Treatise cited in Abhidharma Mahāvibhāṣa Śāstra also speaks of a pudgala that seems very similar to that asserted by the Saṃkrāntivāda:

“As that treatise states: “The pudgala is a singular entity, not divided, not five-fold.... But each of the skandha-s has a distinctive intrinsic characteristic.”

The pudgala, it claims is not differentiated in respect of characteristic, for this pudgala so claimed is without parts and undifferentiated in characteristic. It abides permanently without changing, for it cannot be ruined by birth, old-age, sickness and death. It is not touched by phenomenal processes. This form part of the material for the Saṃkrāntivāda.

Following the line of historical development and doctrinally, we can conclude that the Saṃkrāntivāda is influenced by the Vātsīputrīya and Sarvāsativāda doctrine of svabhāva and kāritra. The Vātsīputrīya proposes the concept of a pudgala to explain the process of samsara and agent of karma. Here we see the fundamental skandhas of the Samkrantivada that migrates from one existence to the next one is very similar to the idea of the Vātsīputrīya's pudgala going round in saṃsāra. Thus the Saṃkrāntivāda's doctrine looks like a compromise between the Vātsīputrīya and Sarvāsativāda doctrines. They inherited both their theories but the Sarvāsativāda's influenced is greater.

Yin Shun writes:

The Vātsīputrīya and Saṃkrāntivāda established the self (Ātman) discussing the purpose for the sake of establishing the continuity of birth and death and the connection [that allows one] to move from saṃsāra to liberation. But Vātsīputrīya does not take “selfhood “ as the true principle, as the content of liberation (Yin Shun, 1992).

Following the line of historical development and doctrinally, we can conclude that the Saṃkrāntivāda is influenced by the Vātsīputrīya's pudgalavāda and the

Sarvāsitivāda doctrine of svabhāva kāritra. The idea of the unchanging fundamental skandha and activity skandha is more likely to be derived from the idea of the svabhāva and its kāritra respectively. Thus the Saṃkrāntivāda doctrine looks like a compromise between the Vātsīputrīya and Sarvāsitivāda doctrines. They inherited both their theories but the Sarvāsitivāda-s influence is greater.